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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CHARGE BRIEFS DIPLOMATIC CORPS ON VISITS OF FIRST LADY AND PRIME MINISTER NAZIF, ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO PRESS EGYPT TO ACCEPT INTERNATIONAL ELECTION MONITORS

REF: A. CAIRO 3953 (NOTAL)

1B. CAIRO 3952

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

11. (SBU) Summary. The Charge briefed the diplomatic corps May 26 on the visits of Egyptian Prime Minister Nazif to the United States and First Lady Laura Bush to the Middle East. Sharing transcripts of public statements and media interviews related to the two recent visits, the Charge offered his analysis of the visits and answered questions on the status of U.S.-Egyptian relations, a bilateral Free Trade Agreement, and international monitors for Egypt's coming elections. On the latter issue, the Charge repeated President Bush's May 7 statement in Latvia calling for acceptance of international election monitors by Egypt and encouraged attendees to urge their governments to similarly press Egypt to accept them. End summary.

12. (SBU) After describing the itineraries for the Prime Minister's U.S. visit and that of the First Lady to Egypt and the region, the Charge explained the context of their exchanges and the content of their respective agendas. The Charge characterized both visits as excellent and as having contributed positively to efforts to improve the bilateral relationship. The Prime Minister was well received and presented a serious message to the entire spectrum of key opinion-shapers in Washington and New York. The First Lady, focusing on education, women's empowerment, and democratic transformation (ref A), was equally well-received by the GOE, with her public remarks on Egyptian political reform efforts eliciting praise from Egyptian officials and others (ref B). The Charge also called attention to Deputy Secretary Zoellick's address to the World Economic Forum, commending it to his counterparts as an authoritative overview of U.S. policy objectives in the region.

13. (SBU) Among the questions asked by the group of 35 senior diplomats from the G-8, the European Union, and other select countries were whether a timetable existed for completion of a bilateral Free Trade Agreement; whether regional political issues were discussed with PM Nazif; details of the First Lady's discussions with Egyptian women activists; the meaning of President Mubarak's decision not to visit the U.S. this year; whether the Secretary of State intended to visit Egypt to pursue the Forum for the Future agenda; and whether Egypt would host an Iraq conference preparatory committee meeting in early June.

14. (SBU) Attendees expressed particular interest in the issue of international election monitors for Egypt, with one diplomat asking for details of USG policy on the issue and another wondering if Deputy Secretary Zoellick's recent public remarks on "impartial monitoring" of Egypt's elections was intended to walk back President Bush's call for international monitors, by signalling Washington's acceptance of Egyptian judges playing the monitoring role alone. In response, the Charge recalled President Bush's May 7 remarks in Latvia in which he said Egyptian elections "should proceed with international monitors, and with rules that allow a real campaign." The Charge noted that Egypt already welcomes international monitoring of its political processes via international media observation and invitations to various international non-governmental organizations (including the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute) to attend the ruling party's annual policy conferences. Allowing international monitors to scrutinize elections (as in a multitude of countries, including the U.S.) is now normal electoral practise, the Charge said, and should be acceptable to Egypt. Noting the shared goal among G-8 and other colleagues to encourage Egypt's acceptance of international election monitors, the Charge called upon his colleagues to encourage their own capitals to press the GOE to accept monitors for coming national elections.

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GRAY